



News Release

For immediate release: March 26, 2014

(14-043)

Contacts: [Tim Church](#), Communications Office

360-236-4077

Illegal tobacco sales to minors remain high for second consecutive year

About 15 percent of tobacco retailers sold to minors in 2013

OLYMPIA – The number of retailers in Washington illegally selling tobacco to minors is high for the second year in a row. An annual report that tracks illegal sales shows about 15 percent of tobacco retailers sold tobacco to minors in 2013 — that’s about the same as it was in 2012. As recently as 2009 the rate was much lower, at about 9 percent.

“It’s unacceptable that more than one in seven retailers in our state illegally sells tobacco to minors,” said Secretary of Health John Wiesman. “Stopping youth from buying tobacco is one of the best prevention tools we have. It only works when retailers follow the law. They must do better. The health of Washington’s youth is at stake.”

Youth who smoke are more likely to smoke as adults and die prematurely from a smoking-caused disease. They are also more likely to have other challenges such as poor grades and illegal drug use. About 85 percent of Washington adult smokers start at or before age 18.

The rate of stores selling tobacco to minors is tracked in the annual Synar Report. The report is the result of federal legislation that requires states to enact and enforce laws that prohibit the sales of tobacco products to minors, and to conduct annual, random, unannounced compliance checks. The report is compiled by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Compliance checks are conducted by local health agencies and the state Liquor Control Board. Working with local law enforcement, underage teens try to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products at randomly selected retailers. Clerks who sell tobacco to minors can be fined up to \$100; retail owners can be fined up to \$1,500 and may have their license revoked up to five years.

— More —

If the rate of retailers selling tobacco to minors exceeds 20 percent, Washington could lose \$13.5 million dollars in federal funding for drug, alcohol, and tobacco prevention and treatment. While official youth checks determine the rate of illegal sales, anyone can report a violation on the state [Liquor Control Board website](#).

Washington's 10th-grade youth smoking rate is about 10 percent. That's about half of what it was in 2000. Still, there's more work to do. Nearly 49,000 youth in our state smoke and 40 start using cigarettes each day. Making sure stores don't illegally sell tobacco to children helps youth remain free from addiction, disease, and death caused by smoking.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for further information on tobacco use in Washington state. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

###